

Given the state of our struggling economy, our continuing war in Iraq, and the many other great challenges facing our nation I left the President's final State of the Union a little flat. I didn't feel the President's speech included many new ideas for solving our country's most pressing problems.

For example, the President once again said that breaking our dependence on foreign oil should be a priority. And while I'm pleased the President mentioned clean coal technology in his speech he did not say anything about the exciting new prospect of using coal to develop liquid fuel to help break that reliance on foreign oil.

I believe in advancing the use of coal to provide the affordable energy needed to ensure continued American prosperity and future energy independence. America possesses 250 years of domestic coal reserves and I'm confident that further development of clean coal technologies will enable coal to be utilized in an environmentally friendly way.

I believe an investment by Congress in clean coal technology is an investment in the future of America. One of the best ways to help us to stop sending American energy dollars abroad in the near future is to invest in the proven technology of turning coal into a liquid fuel. It can already be used in planes, and hopefully it will soon be able to be used by our cars and trucks.

Since we are rich in coal in our area, promoting this technology will mean jobs. But it's also good for the nation; every step we can take to reduce our need of foreign oil translates to fewer wars over resources, less foreign debt and more control of our own future. I look forward to continuing my work in Congress to support this important technology.

On a positive note, the President advocated reforming the earmark process in Congress. I have to say I'm glad he's coming around to our way of thinking! The amount of earmarks funded in the 2008 budget was half of what the Republicans funded in the last budget that they passed. Democrats promised we'd cut the earmarks in half and that's what we did.

Earmarks exploded under Republican leadership and spending was out of control. I'm proud that Democrats led the way in bringing transparency and accountability to the earmark process. Democrats look forward to working with Republicans to continue the process of earmark reform that we started.

The truth is, there are good earmarks and bad earmarks. With the transparent process we now have, there aren't any bridges to nowhere. The project funding I brought home is targeted to specific needs along the Ohio River and throughout Appalachia that frankly the folks in other states just don't care about. Still, those projects are important to southern and eastern Ohio as we work together to boost our economic development, create jobs, bring down our poverty rate and keep our citizens safe.

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